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AUTHOR	Dils, A. Keith
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ABSTRACT

This study assessed current self-professed teacher leader preparation and teacher leader behaviors, comparing selected teacher leader characteristics with characteristics of the general population of public school teachers (using Department of Education data). Subjects were selected via a stratified random sample of teachers whose email addresses appeared in their school's Web site and teacher email listservs. Respondents completed a teacher leader survey instrument. Results indicated that respondents held significantly more graduate degrees, were significantly more likely to hold one of several education majors, showed a significantly higher percentage of formal participation in mentoring another teacher, and showed a meaningfully higher percentage of formal participation in individual or collaborative professional research than did the general population of teachers. They tended to use and develop technology as a teaching tool, develop and assess standards, participate in professional organizations, write for publication, write and implement grants for new programs, and connect with higher education. They tended not to hold positions of influence in professional teacher organizations, hold positions of influence in unions, take the lead in forming partnerships with businesses and other organizations, and participate in the political process by running for office. (Contains 22 references.) (SM)

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Preparation and Behavior of Self-Professed Teacher-Leaders

A. Keith Dils, EdD.

Assistant Professor of Education,

King's College, Wilkes-Barre PA

(570) 288-2181 (H)

(570) 208-5900 ext. 5385 kdils@kings.edu (W)

Keith Dils is an Assistant Professor of Education at King's College.

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Abstract

This study aims to assess current self-professed teacher-leader preparation and teacher-leader behaviors by comparing selected teacher-leader characteristics with characteristics of the general population of public school teachers (as determined by the Department of Education [1998]).

Subjects were selected via two means: (1) a stratified random sample of teachers whose email addresses appeared at their school's Web site (listed on the "Web66" list of public school Web sites), and (2) teacher email list serves.

Findings indicate that the responding self-professed teacher-leaders hold significantly more graduate degrees, are significantly more likely to hold one of several education majors, show a demonstrably higher percentage of formal participation in mentoring another teacher, and show a meaningfully higher percentage of formal participation in individual or collaborative professional research than the general population of teachers.

Given the fact that those professing to be teacher leaders report engaging in many valuable teacher leader behaviors, it is suggested that future research be focused on specific teacher leader behaviors and there impact on change. Such research is needed to help teacher educators map their curriculum and to help practicing teachers more specifically tailor their behaviors.

Preparation and Behavior of Self-Professed Teacher-Leaders

Introduction

Several case studies have been conducted in order to learn more about teacher-leader behaviors. Wasley (1991) used the case study method to describe three examples of teacher-leaders. One case study described a teacher-leader who created an experiential learning enterprise outside the school curriculum by establishing a self-sufficient, student-run magazine. The second described how a teacher served inside the school curriculum as an assistant to the principal. And the third case study described a reflective teacher-leader who modeled in an interdisciplinary, heterogeneous classroom demonstration center for other fellow teachers to watch and learn.

Stone and colleagues (1997) used the case-study method and determined that the teacher-leaders they observed engaged in a variety of professional activities, such as staff committees, grade level leads, curriculum development, grant writing and implementation, technology, mentoring, and school site council. Wolfe and Manning (1997) offered seven suggestions for English teacher's employing effective strategies to effectuate school improvement:

1. Do not coerce
2. Help when asked
3. Conduct classroom-based research
4. Be the school's best listener
5. Relate to colleagues as to students

6. Organize seminars/workshops that focus on best practices

7. Work visibly

Finally, Harris and Drake (1997) reported that teacher-leaders tend to engage in classroom action research. Although these and other teacher-leader case studies provide valuable information about individual teacher-leaders, no national survey has been conducted that provides an overview of teacher-leadership and how it is currently being practiced in public schools across the country.

In 1996 the Department of Education gathered data from a large group of teacher-leaders. In assembling 120 exemplary public and private school teachers from across the nation, the Department noted the following forms of teacher-leadership: participating in professional teacher organizations, taking part in school decisions, defining what students need to know and be able to do, sharing ideas with colleagues, mentoring new teachers, helping make personnel decisions, improving facilities and technology, working with parents, creating various partnerships, becoming politically involved, and becoming leaders (Paulu and Winters, 1998). However, this study did not involve a representative sample providing an overview of teacher-leadership and how it is currently being practiced in public schools across the country

In 1998, on the other hand, the U.S. Department of Education did identify the preparation and qualifications associated with selected behaviors of the *general population of public school teachers*. Nowhere in the literature is there similar teacher-leader data that would allow comparisons to the data collected by the Department of Education's 1998 study.

Accordingly we need to determine: (1) What teacher-leader behaviors are currently being practiced in public schools; (2) how these teacher-leader behaviors differ from general-population teacher behaviors; and (3) what academic preparation is associated with teacher-leaders and whether this academic preparation is different from the general population of teachers. Because little data has been collected nationally on the preparation experiences that are associated with current teacher-leader behaviors, the present study used the teacher-leader behaviors identified by the U.S. Department of Education, as well as others generated from a review of the literature, to construct a survey instrument to answer several research questions. These are listed in Table 1.

Table 1 about here

Methods

Procedure

Access to a representative teacher pool can be obtained via electronic mail or email, because 78% of public schools are believed to have access to the Internet (Bare and Meek, 1998). According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1997), 40% of teachers (except those employed by a college or a university) use computers on the job for electronic mail and bulletin boards. Becker (1999) more recently found that 39% of teachers have Internet access in their classrooms and a majority of teachers (59%) have Internet access at home; only one fourth (27%) do not have access either at home or in the classroom. Furthermore, no inequities in computer availability between rural and non-rural schools are apparent in the United States (Bigham, 1993).

Therefore, this study used email sources to reach a stratified random sample of self-professed teacher-leaders. One such source of teachers was the "Web66" Internet web site, which can be located on the Web at *http://web66.coled.umn.edu/ schools.html*. "Web66" is a project of the University of Minnesota College of Education & Human Development, Office of Information Technology and Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement, to provide Internet access to public schools and their teachers. To this end, "Web66" lists 8841 schools from rural, urban, and suburban areas of the Northeast, South, Midwest, and West regions of the United States.

Another source of potential teacher-leaders with access to email is email list serves. An email list serve connects subscribers electronically so that when one subscriber posts an email message to the list, all subscribers receive that email. The "H-High-H Social Studies List," the "National Council of Social Studies List," and the "National Council of Teachers of English List" were used for this study to gain access to approximately 2500 subscribers (D. Adams; personal communication, September 30, 1999).

A stratified random sample was taken from the email sources. Every third school listed on the "Web66" Web site was accessed and every fifth teacher email address listed on that school's Web site was emailed a questionnaire. A total of 700 potential respondents were reached via this method. All 2500 teachers subscribing to the H-High-H history list, the National Council of Social Studies list, and the National Council of Teachers of English email list were sent a questionnaire. Each questionnaire began with the following solicitation: "If you consider yourself a full-time K-12 teacher attempting to

lead educational reform, please take 3 minutes to contribute to the understanding of teacher-leaders by: (1) clicking the reply button; and (2) completing the Teacher-leader Survey by placing an "x" to the LEFT of your response to each of the following questions (on or near the line provided)."

As mentioned previously, the survey instrument items were generated with a literature review. The survey was tested for clarity by soliciting responses and feedback from five teachers not participating in the study.

Results

Response Rate

All 146 survey responses returned were available for analysis (71 via the "Web66" email list and the remainder via the list serves). Because this study relied on teachers to self-report their status as teacher-leaders, teacher-leaders known to be contacted were those responding to the survey. Therefore, the return rate of 4.5% provides an estimate of the response rate of teachers leader respondents. However, because the sample is representative of the population, it can be estimated, with at least 95% confidence, the worst sampling error for the data to be approximately plus or minus 3% (Babbie, 1973).

Current Preparation of Teacher-leaders

The distribution of graduate degrees was significantly greater for the surveyed self-professed teacher-leaders than for the general population of full-time public school teachers as reported by the U.S. Department of Education (1998). These are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 about here

Table 2 shows that for 2 degrees of freedom, a Chi-square of 17.25 ($p<0.001$) indicates a significant distribution. Clearly, the teacher leader respondents show a higher percentage of graduate degrees.

Table 3 indicates the distribution of teachers with some type of education major was significantly greater for the surveyed self-professed teacher-leaders than that for the general population of full-time public school teachers. As shown in table 3, teacher leaders were less likely (25%) to hold an academic area major than the general population of teachers (38%), and more likely to hold one of several education majors (75%) than the general population of teachers (62%; chi-square(3)=71.32, $p<.001$).

Table 3 about here

Teacher Leader Behaviors

The mentoring of another teacher in a formal relationship by respondents occurred at a higher incidence than the 26% of the general population of full-time public school teachers (Table 4). Table 4 shows that for 4 degrees of freedom, a Chi-square of 302.22 ($p<0.001$) indicates a significant distribution. Clearly, the teacher leader respondents show a higher percentage of formal participation in mentoring another teacher.

Table 4 about here

The individual or collaborative research activities of respondents was greater than the 53% of the general population of full-time public school teachers (Table 5). Table 5 shows that for 4 degrees of freedom, a Chi-square of 144.73 ($p<0.001$) indicates a significant distribution. Clearly, the teacher leader respondents show a higher percentage of formal participation in individual or collaborative professional research.

Table 5 about here

Table 6 lists percentages for each of the teacher-leader behaviors generated by the literature review in which self-professed teacher-leaders engage.

Table 6 about here

Self-professed teacher-leaders reported the following additional teacher-leader behaviors:

- The use and development of technology as a teaching tool, such as developing classroom Web sites for the purposes of providing parent information and displaying students' work
- Curriculum committee work, such as summer curriculum writing for the district
- Developing and assessing standards such as writing school district student exit criteria and serving on benchmarking panels for state tests

- Participation in professional organizations, such as presenting at conferences
- Writing for publication for state and national teacher publications
- Engaging in other professional development such as Fulbright trips to foreign countries
- Serving as department chair or on the principal's cabinet
- Collaborating with other schools on student projects
- Serving as a school activity leader, such as student council sponsor
- Teaching other teachers by providing things such as in-service training to adapt to block scheduling
- Writing and implementing grants for new programs
- Connecting with higher education by teaching classes at a local university or by serving as a member of a research team by developing, for example, an instrument that might predict the success of an early middle level education major in the classroom
- Launching alternative schools by, as one respondent reported, putting together a proposal for a type of alternative school with an emphasis on year-round education, flexible scheduling, and technology

Conclusions

If teacher educators are to succeed in inspiring reform-minded teacher-leaders, then they must contend with several socializing influences. Prior to entering teacher education, prospective teachers form strong ideas about what teaching is and how teachers should

behave. Lortie (1975) stated that these preconceptions are formed by student's observations of their own teachers for the length of their schooling—otherwise known as the "apprenticeship of observation." Not only must teacher educators contend with this pretraining influence, but they also must prepare teachers to face negative socializing influences from fellow teachers that may discourage teacher-leader behaviors (Schempp & Graber, 1992). Induction-year teachers have been known to experience a "reality shock" (Smyth, 1992). To deal with "reality shock," these inexperienced teachers may turn to senior teachers in whom they hold in high esteem. Zeichner and Tabachnik (1981) described a "washout effect," which occurs when beginning teachers (in an attempt to deal with the unanticipated realities of teaching) replace the model teaching behaviors advocated by teacher educators with those of senior teacher colleagues. A question, then, arises as to what teacher preparation may help teacher-leaders resist negative socialization and conformity.

The present study appears to support the idea that teachers with high levels of education are more likely to resist conformity. For example, teacher-leader respondents demonstrated a higher percentage of Master's degrees (74%) than the general population of teachers (45%). Future studies should compare teacher-leaders with the general population of teachers concerning their degrees held prior to entering the teaching profession in order to more clearly see the effects of education on resisting negative socialization and "reality shock."

Along with negative socialization, teacher-leaders must also overcome several other barriers. For instance, teachers often lack the time to complete their regular duties as well as the additional responsibilities that leadership entails (LeBlanc & Shelton,

1997). Another barrier is role confusion. Some schools are instituting a shared decision-making model (SDM), which may spur teacher-leadership by encouraging principals to collaborate with teachers (Lashway, 1996). Confusion often occurs because, with SDM, teachers must change their roles to meet multiple expectations as well as to interact with principals who are also unsure of their roles (Kerchner & Murphy,1986; Lashway, 1996). Konzal (1997) found that parents may also constitute a barrier to teacher-leadership via several obstacles: diversity of parent backgrounds and mental models; a gap between parent and teacher understanding about what makes a good school; ambivalence about the status of parents in the school community; lack of mutual trust and respect; and time constraints. Konzal's study concluded that educational leaders need to form a community in which parents and professionals together construct models of a "good" school.

Because teacher-leaders were less likely (25%) to hold an academic area major than the general population of teachers (38%) and were more likely to hold one of several education majors (75%) than the general population of teachers (62%), it appears that teachers with education majors are more likely to face and overcome the barriers to teacher-leadership than teachers who do not hold education majors. Future studies should isolate more clearly the various teacher-education programs and their association with teachers overcoming the barriers to leader leadership.

Having overcome the barriers to teacher-leadership, teacher-leaders noted a variety of scholarly behaviors. Teacher-leader respondents reported behaviors such as formal participation in mentoring another teacher and participation in individual or collaborative professional research at a significantly higher rate then the general

population of teachers. The extensive list of other behaviors reported by teacher-leaders highlights the innovative approach teacher-leaders take once overcoming the barriers to teacher-leadership in response to their various contexts.

The behaviors that a majority of respondents reported *not* engaging in included: holding a position of influence in a professional teacher organization; holding a position of influence in a union; taking the lead in forming partnerships with businesses and other organizations; and participating in the political process by running for and being elected to offices that range from state legislator to school board member. These activities, while providing leadership, may be less appealing to teacher-leaders as they stray from the scholarly domain.

In summary, current preparation of teacher-leaders differs from the general population of teachers, and the prevalence of selected teacher-leader behaviors are significantly greater than that found in the general population of teachers. Given the fact that those professing to be teacher leaders report engaging in many valuable teacher leader behaviors, it is suggested that future research investigate what specific teacher leadership behaviors ought to be pursued and to what ends. For example, rather than describing and promoting the vague notion of "collaboration with parents," specific types of collaborative activities and the aims of these activities should be investigated concerning appropriateness and effectiveness.

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Table 1

Key Research Questions for Survey Instrument

Current Preparation of Teacher-Leaders
1. Will the distribution of graduate degrees be significantly greater for the surveyed self-professed teacher leaders than the general population of full-time public school teachers as reported by the U.S. Department of Education (1998)?
2. Will the distribution of general area education majors be significantly greater for the surveyed self-professed teacher-leaders than the general population of full time public school teachers as reported by the U.S. Department of Education (1998)?
Teacher-Leader Behaviors
1. Is the incidence of selected teacher-leader behaviors greater in the responding self-professed teacher-leaders than in the general population of teachers?
1a. Will the individual or collaborative research activities of respondents be significantly greater than the 53% of the general population of full-time public school teachers (U.S. Department of Education, 1998)?
1b. Will mentoring another teacher in a formal relationship by respondents occur at a significantly higher incidence than the 26% of the general population of full-time public school teachers (U.S. Department of education, 1998)?
2. What perceived teacher-leader behaviors will be reported by the responding self-professed teacher-leaders?
2a. What percentage of responding self-professed teacher-leaders will have engaged in each of the 22 teacher-leader behaviors generated by a literature review?
2b. What additional teacher-leader behaviors will be reported by responding self-professed teacher-leaders in response to an open ended survey question asking for additional teacher-leader behaviors?

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Table 2

Distribution of Degrees Held

	Degree		
Type of Teacher	Bachelor's	Master's	Doctorate
Teacher Leaders	146 (100%)	108 (74%)	4 (3%)
General Population Of Teachers	3560 (100%)	1602 (45%)	36 (1%)

Table 3

Academic Major Distribution

	Major			
Type of Teacher	Academic	Subject Ed.	General Ed.	Other Ed.
Teacher Leaders	71 (25%)	105 (37%)	78 (28%)	29 (10%)
General Population Of Teachers	1353 (38%)	641 (18%)	1317 (37%)	249 (7%)

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Table 4

Formal Participation in Mentoring Another Teacher

Type of Teacher	Frequency				
	Never	A Few Times Per Year	Once a Month	2 to 3 Times a month	At Least Once Per Week
Teacher Leaders	27 (19%)	39 (27%)	37 (26%)	11 (7%)	31 (21%)
General Population Of Teachers	2634 (73%)	350 (9%)	107 (3%)	142 (4%)	392 (11%)

Table 5

Participation in Individual or Collaborative Research

Type of Teacher	Frequency				
	Never	A Few Times Per Year	Once a Month	2 to 3 Times a month	At Least Once Per Week
Teacher Leaders	46 (34%)	12 (9%)	15 (11%)	6 (4%)	57 (21%)
General Population Of Teachers	1637 (47%)	890 (25%)	178 (8%)	320 (9%)	356 (10%)

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Table 6

Teacher-Leader Behaviors Reported by Self-Professed Teacher-Leaders

Behavior	Frequency	
	Never	At Least Once
a. Worked on teams with administrators to plan improvements within your school	8%	92%
b. Developed academic standards, rewritten curriculum, and assessments to reflect new standards	12%	88%
c. Developed and led professional development programs for colleagues aimed at helping them improve skills needed to help students reach high standards	22%	78%
d. Was consulted in hiring new teachers and administrators	39%	61%
e. Played an important role in improving education facilities and technology	23%	77%
f. Encouraged mothers, fathers, and other adults to be involved in schools as well as give ideas to better link schools and home	10%	90%
g. Worked with the community to improve the schools	27%	73%
h. Helped colleges and universities develop their teaching education curriculum and encouraged teachers-in-training	46%	54%
i. Led efforts so other educators, parents, policy makers and members of the community are aware of teachers' abilities and accomplishments	40%	60%
j. Held a position of influence in a professional teacher organization	56%	44%
k. Held a position of influence in a teacher union	70%	30%
l. Took the lead in forming partnerships with businesses and other organizations	56%	44%
m. Led community groups and organizations	60%	40%
n. Participated in the political process by running for and being elected to offices that range from state legislator to school board member	96%	4%

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